

# Leak City

## Washington insiders are giving the nation's capital a new name.

by Robert Garcia

Newsweek

Time

U.S. News & World Report

*AMERICAN POLITICS - 23*

Date *AUG. 1987*

"... it has become an art-form in this city."

—Rear Adm. and former National Security Adviser John M. Poindexter on news leaks in the nation's capital, during testimony before the Iran/Contra Committee, July 15, 1987.

It is pervasive. It cuts across the lines of party affiliation, political leaning, income, employment, age and education. According to the results of the first annual *American Politics* "Inside-The-Beltway" Readers Poll, the practice known as leaking has become a standard operating procedure for a significant number of Washington insiders. More than one in four of those who describe themselves as politicians, Capitol Hill staffers, attorneys and lobbyists acknowledge having at some time shared a secret with the news media.

Our survey was conducted several weeks prior to the Congressional testimony of Oliver North and John Poindexter; in other words, before the American public developed an unprecedented awareness of the news leak issue. Of the 786 responses we received before our deadline, more than 28 percent checked yes for the question, "Have you ever leaked information to the news media?"

### Profile of a Leaker

They are nestled in offices spread throughout the District of Columbia. Many work on Capitol Hill, where one in three Hill staffers have leaked information, and where the boss is likely to join them. Of the 16 respondents who described themselves as politicians, 10 said they had leaked information at one time or another. The highest overall percentages of leakers were found among those who identified themselves as Democrats (33 percent), liberals (36 percent), lobbyists (37 percent), those aged 35-54

(34 percent) and men (30 percent). Generally, our results suggest that the higher the salary and level of education, the greater the likelihood that one will leak.

The comparative percentages between our group samples are sometimes very close and therefore not necessarily definitive in those cases. But, without doubt, leaking is a widespread practice. And, for the first time that we're aware of, there's now a fairly reliable figure to quantify it.

The results do suggest that liberals are more likely to leak information than conservatives (23 percent) or moderates (29 percent). And Democrats are more likely to leak information than Republicans (26 percent) or independents (19 percent).

Men are more likely to leak than women (20 percent), and readers who "trust and depend the most" on The Washington Post and The New York Times are more given to the practice (33 percent and 29 percent) than those who place greater faith in The Wall Street Journal (24 percent). CBS fans have the highest percentage of leakers (33 percent), followed by NBC, ABC and CNN.

If you believe you can place your faith only in a group that is less than than one-quarter leaker, then you might want to avoid all of the following: politicians; Capitol Hill staffers; Democrats; liberals; Republicans; lobbyists; men; those who are middle-aged; those who describe themselves as "socially liberal, fiscally conservative"; those with a college degree or higher, and those who "trust and depend the most" on The Washington Post, The New York Times and the three non-cable, commercial television networks.

**Methodology and What The Poll Results Don't Mean**

Leaking is driven by diverse motives, discloses various sorts and magnitudes of information and has widely divergent results. Our survey does not speak to these issues, so it is important not to read too much into these results. Our readers have told us one simple but very important part of the equation: Leaking, whatever the motive or result, is the practice of roughly one-fourth of Washington insiders.

The wide-ranging "Inside-The-Beltway" poll was published in the magazine's June 1987 issue. The accompanying response cards were completed by readers and mailed back, postage paid by *American Politics*. No other inducement was offered to boost the response rate. Of the nearly 900 responses received, 786 arrived by the June 21 due date and were subject to cross-tabulated analysis. Of these, 781 responded to the news leak question.

The readership of *American Politics* is concentrated almost entirely in and around Washington and includes every office on Capitol Hill; Federal offices; the city's top lawyers, lobbyists and diplomats; trade associations, and others commonly perceived as Washington insiders. The close correlation between the magazine's controlled-circulation distribution pattern and the responses to the applicable employment questions in the demographic section of the survey (none exceeded a 4 percent difference and most were within 1 percent) indicate that the poll's results represent a reliable cross section of the readership.

We emphasize that the survey responses were received prior to the testimony of Oliver North and John Poindexter, after which the issue of leaks became highly topical. The responses, therefore, are much less likely to reflect any personal bias than if the news leak question had been posed after leaks

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emerged as a major issue.

The complete results of the survey will appear in our September issue, but because of the timely nature of the news leak issue, we decided to release this information in advance. ●

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## NEWS LEAKS American Politics Readership Survey Analysis

### HAVE YOU EVER LEAKED INFORMATION TO THE NEWS MEDIA?

**TOTAL: Yes 222 28.4% No 559 71.6%**

#### Leakers by Demographic Groups

		Total	Leakers	Percent
<i>Party</i>	Democrats	338	113	33.4
	Republicans	305	80	26.2
	Independents	140	27	19.3
<i>Politics</i>	Liberals	184	66	35.9
	Conservatives	272	62	22.8
	Moderates	314	91	29.0
<i>Job</i>	Politicians	16	10	62.5
	Capitol Hill Staffers	193	60	31.1
	Diplomatic Corps	6	2	33.3
	Attorneys	155	42	27.1
	Lobbyists	73	27	37.0
	Business People	100	18	18.0
	Federal Employees	66	15	22.7
	Association Employees	30	10	33.3
	Other	125	28	22.4
<i>Age</i>	18-24	76	11	14.5
	25-34	213	57	26.8
	35-44	242	83	34.3
	45-54	155	51	32.9
	55-64	75	16	21.3
	65 +	22	2	9.0
<i>Income</i>	15,000-19,999	67	2	2.9
	20,000-24,999	68	17	25.0
	25,000-34,999	96	25	26.0
	35,000-49,999	93	23	24.7
	50,000-74,999	159	59	37.1
	75,000-99,999	83	27	32.5
	100,000 +	211	69	32.7
<i>Education</i>	High School Grad.	9	2	22.2
	Some College	57	11	19.3
	College Degree	203	55	27.1
	Some Grad. School	118	33	28.0
	Grad. School Degree	398	121	30.4
<i>Sex</i>	Male	643	194	30.2
	Female	141	28	19.9

#### Leakers by Media Preference

		Total	Leakers	Percent
(1) <i>Newspapers</i>	Washington Post	207	68	32.9
	Washington Times	39	11	28.2
	New York Times	163	47	28.8
	Los Angeles Times	12	4	33.3
	Wall Street Journal	230	54	23.5
	USA Today	21	3	14.3
(2) <i>T.V. News</i>	CBS	173	57	32.9
	ABC	137	37	27.0
	NBC	176	54	30.7
	CNN	184	46	25.0

The cross-tabulations are based on responses to the following questions:

- (1) Which of the following newspapers do you trust and depend on the most?
- (2) What network television coverage do you trust and depend on the most?

Note: Media preference results should be read as follows: 32.9 percent of *American Politics* readers who say they "trust and depend" the most on The Washington Post acknowledge having leaked information.